



# The Post-Standard

## Better Mileage

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Now more than ever, fuel economy in American automobiles must be improved.

One argument for more efficient vehicles - combating sky-high gas prices - has recently surpassed all the others: reducing air pollution, stemming the nation's dependence on foreign oil, competing with fuel-efficient foreign cars.

But all those reasons are valid. That's why legislation proposed by Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-New Hartford, to require U.S. automakers to produce cars that get better gas mileage is well worth looking into.

Under Boehlert's bill, automakers would have to increase their average gas-mileage standards for cars, vans and light trucks from the current 25 miles per gallon to 33 mpg over 10 years. The average SUV owner would save \$2,000 over the life of a vehicle, assuming gas costs \$2 per gallon, proponents say. At today's \$3-plus prices, the savings would be even more.

The bill includes provisions to protect American companies that might be adversely affected by the requirements. It's an important consideration locally, with DeWitt-based New Process Gear being the world's largest maker of four-wheel-drive transfer cases for sport-utility vehicles. Boehlert's bill would allow automakers unable to meet the standards to buy credits from companies that have met the standards, thereby avoiding penalties and saving jobs. The bill also would allow the secretary of transportation to set different standards for different vehicles, based on their size.

"I know there's always concern here in Central New York because of New Process," Boehlert said. "People have to understand this is going to benefit them . . . and will not sacrifice safety or jobs."

Boehlert added that since Chrysler is now making hybrids, New Process Gear could benefit from the new business from a major customer. Boehlert also pointed to the incentive represented by the recent agreement the major car manufacturers signed with Canada to increase fuel efficiency in five years for cars it sells to that country.

And with some countries passing along profits from oil sales to terrorist organizations, "This is a national security issue of the highest order," Boehlert added.

Even a representative for the Automobile Manufacturers' Alliance said fuel-efficiency standards don't mean cars have to be lighter and more dangerous, Boehlert pointed out.

The case is strong and getting stronger. Boehlert's bill has gained support each time it has been voted on. "The dynamics have shifted considerably," said Joe Pouliot, communications director for the House Science Committee, which Boehlert chairs. "We're optimistic we can move this legislation now."

Since the effort could lead to less reliance on foreign oil and a cleaner environment, it should be taken seriously. It could lead to the kind of progress needed.

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